

the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons. This was followed by the Decade of Disabled Persons and the development of the U.N. Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities of Disabled Persons. But these efforts, while important, have been non-binding.

A binding instrument, or, a U.N. Convention, that states can sign and ratify is the next natural step, and it would be a travesty if the United States, which has been at the forefront of the United Nations human rights and disability efforts were not at the forefront of this one. People with disabilities in our country have benefited from the United Nations leadership. Our own National Organization on Disability, of which I have served as President since its founding in 1982, is a direct outgrowth of the United Nations initiative. Literally thousands of national and local organizations throughout the world have come into being and continue to derive their stimulus from the United Nations' core concern. The U.N. stimulates and nurtures interactions among those with disabilities and has helped enormously in solidifying our cause as a global one. Certainly, progress must come about within nations, but the international communication and interaction has provided wonderful opportunities for the exchange of ideas and learning centered on shared values. This International Convention will, as other United Nations instrumentalities before it have done, encourage and stimulate these interactions and that will be very worthwhile for those with disabilities and their family members.

Intensified international communication in the important area of disability, as we witness every day, is good for Americans with disabilities and for our organizations—just as I know our participation benefits our counterparts abroad. This ongoing dialogue and sharing in this area of common interest helps create a climate conducive to active diplomacy in other more political areas of concern. It generates mutual understanding that is so much in need in our world today.

It is incomprehensible that the United States would not seize the opportunity in this non-controversial area of common interest, an area in which we are acknowledged world leader, to ensure the best possible Convention that reflects our principles and values we cherish.

Continued United Nations progress for our fifth of humanity is an economic, social, and humanitarian imperative. The eyes of the world are upon us. Like the United Nations World Programme of Action before it, the U.N. Convention on Disability Rights will be a beacon of hope for people with disabilities and for all mankind.

Mr. Chairman, I have written President Bush urging that he and his administration vigorously support this Convention at the United Nations. I have urged him to support in all possible ways H. Con. Res. 169. I request your permission to include in the record this letter in its entirety along with my remarks here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Letter to President George W. Bush]

MARCH 31, 2004.

Hon. GEORGE W. BUSH, *President of the United States*,
WASHINGTON, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: Shortly after taking office, on February 1, 2001, you announced the New Freedom Initiative and expressed your strong commitment to improving the lives of America's 54 million citizens with disabilities. I recall well how proud I was to be on the platform with you that day as you announced your plans to bring to reality the hopes and dreams of our constituency.

The entire world has benefited greatly from America's leadership as our nation has

set the pace for the world through our legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and our leadership in the United Nations of ongoing international disability initiatives. Thanks to this commitment, we are looked to by the world, and especially by its 600 million men, women, and children with disabilities, for spirited leadership in this area of concern.

I therefore write to respectfully request that you continue our nation's world leadership in the area of disability by instructing the U.S. Departments of State and Justice to advance aggressively the work in which our nation and many others are engaged presently at the United Nations to develop a U.N. Convention on Disability Rights. Many other U.N. member nations are wondering why the United States, as a long-time leader in this area of concern (as you and your father have asserted and demonstrated), is not pursuing development of this Convention.

There are humanitarian and economic reasons why America should be out in front on this issue. Because the world's disabled are highly marginalized as a distinct minority as well as within all other minorities, they need America's and the U.N.'s help. The U.N. Convention will encourage action among governments and non-governmental organizations everywhere that will have a profound impact over time. People with disabilities around the world will benefit from America's commitment and example. We Americans with disabilities will continue to benefit greatly from the interactions and sharing of experience stimulated by the Convention.

The United Nations and most members regard disability as a human rights issue. America cannot afford to forfeit its avowed leadership as the champion of human rights in the world, and backing this initiative would be a wonderful expression of our human rights concerns.

Please, Mr. President, direct your Administration team to take a positive, aggressive leadership role in bringing about the U.N. Convention on Disability Rights. I also request that you ensure that the U.S. delegation at the U.N. include people with disabilities themselves to maximize its effectiveness. I am sure you have heard our cry, "nothing about us without us." We need to be at the table.

Finally, the House of Representatives International Relations Committee has recognized the importance and value of such a Convention by voting H. Con. Res. 169 out of committee unanimously. It is currently awaiting scheduling for the floor. We support this resolution and the U.N. Convention itself. We respectfully urge you to seize this opportunity for the good of our nation and for people with disabilities everywhere.

With all best wishes,

Respectfully yours,

ALAN A. REICH,
Chairman.

MARRIAGE PENALTY TAX BILL

HON. RUSH D. HOLT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April 30, 2004

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, when a couple plans to marry, it is a time of anticipation, joy, and yes, stress. There is much to think about, to plan for, and to organize. But when a couple is finally standing at the altar, they should not be thinking about paying more in taxes. When the marriage penalty tax was in effect, there is evidence that couples were thinking just that: many couples stayed unmarried for

tax purposes, and others even tried to game the system by divorcing each December and remarrying each January. Unless they went to great lengths to avoid marriage altogether, many couples were walloped with the marriage penalty at tax time.

The marriage penalty did not always exist. When the Federal Government first levied an income tax in 1913, all taxpayers filed individual tax returns, and the rate schedules did not differentiate between singles and married couples. By basing a married couple's federal income tax entirely on the separate income of each spouse, the original code taxed married couples no differently than it taxed single taxpayers.

Created in 1969, the marriage penalty caused many married couples to pay more in taxes than the sum of what they would have paid as unmarried individuals filing separately. In recent years, it punished married couples where both spouses worked with an average tax penalty of \$1,100, while giving couples where only one spouse worked a marriage bonus. By making the repeal of the marriage penalty permanent, we will allow 70,000 working families in my district—and 810,000 in New Jersey—to use their savings for mortgage payments, car payments, college payments, childcare, or other needed expenses. It will be beneficial to the New Jersey economy.

This vote is the sixth in a series of votes over my time in Congress to remove the marriage penalty. I have always voted for its repeal. In fact, several years ago, I voted to override the former President's veto of it. Simply put, Americans have rejected the idea that our tax laws should make it more expensive to be married than to be single.

Unfortunately, the Republican leadership has made a botch of tax policy in this country. The Tax Code remains burdensome, unwieldy, and in places, unfair. Some Americans pay excessive and unfair taxes relative to other Americans. The unfairness is glaringly obvious. It should be fixed.

I believe, as many do, that tax cuts should first go to the middle-class. Not only do middle-class tax cuts ease the tax burden on the group that feels it most, but they also deliver more economic stimulus than tax cuts targeted to the wealthiest 1 percent. Through middle-class tax cuts, we can help families in New Jersey and around the country provide for their families' healthcare, education, housing, and other priorities.

The marriage penalty is one of the only parts of the Republican tax package that can fairly be described as a middle-class tax cut. That is why I support its repeal, even though I do not support the broader budgetary approach that has taken our country back down the road of deficits as far as the eye can see. Generally speaking, tax policy has a unique role in the American political system: it is perhaps where the government and the citizen interact most directly. Because the marriage penalty seems illogical and capricious, it makes the whole government seem illogical and capricious. The repeal was passed in 2001, and it should be sustained.

Of course, I am disappointed that this legislation is not offset with other revenue or savings. This repeal could have been done with a higher priority placed on balancing the other side of the ledger, but the Republican leadership is more interested in symbolism than fiscal responsibility. Still, although I do not support—and have voted against—the overall

Bush tax cuts because they are skewed to benefit the wealthy, the marriage penalty should not be allowed to return. In accomplishing this victory for married couples and working families, I invite my colleagues to begin immediately to revise their overall budget so that it responsibly and effectively meets America's needs and priorities.

HONORING BLUES LEGEND
"GATEMOUTH" MOORE

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April 30, 2004

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize an African-American

pioneer, 90-year-old blues singer Rev. Arnold Dwight "Gatemouth" Moore.

Nicknamed "Gatemouth" because of his loud singing and speaking voice, Arnold Dwight Moore paved the way for blues. As a boy growing up on world famous Beale Street in Memphis, TN, he was influenced by the African-American culture and heritage that made up the streets and music that was a result of the day to day existence of individuals who lived there. The pride of Beale Street and student of blues was a vocalist at the Elk's, better known as the Blues Bowl.

Moore recorded his first record in 1941 and wrote such songs as "Somebody's Got to Go," "I Ain't Mad at You," "Pretty Baby," and "Did You Ever Love a Woman?" which was later recorded by B.B. King and Rufus Thomas.

Gatemouth lead the way for blues through his firsts. Moore was the first blues singer to sing at Carnegie Hall; the first to travel with W.C. Handy to New York City; first to sing at the segregated Peabody Hotel's Roof Garden; first to sing in many halls around the country, including The Apollo in New York, The Regal in Chicago, the Chicago Civic Center, The Music Hall in Detroit, the Howard Theatre in Washington, DC, and The Royal in Baltimore, MD.

Arnold Dwight "Gatemouth" Moore, listed in the Who's Who in Blues in America, is much more than one of the many blues singers throughout history. He is a true legendary pioneer of blues.